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USARPAC FOR LTG BROWN
PACOM FOR FPA HUSO

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR VISIT TO THAILAND OF USARPAC
COMMANDER LTG JOHN BROWN

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce. Reason 1.4 (a and d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) General Brown, your visit to Bangkok to meet with Royal Thai Army (RTA) leaders and Chiang Mai to observe this year's Cobra Gold exercise will allow you an opportunity to develop relationships with senior Thai Army officers. We have requested meetings for you with RTA CINC GEN Prawit Wongsuwan (General PRAH-WIT), Royal Thai Supreme Command (RTSC) Chief of Staff General Boonsrang Niampradith (General BOON-SANG), RTSC J-3 LTG Khemerat Kanchanawat (General KEM-AH-RAHT), and RTSC J-7 MG Noporat Yodvimol (General NO-PO-RAHT). In these meetings, you will get a sense of how important years of Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) has been. This cooperation was perhaps best illustrated recently during our cooperation to mitigate the damage caused in SE Asia by the December 26 tsunami. Since Cobra Gold this year will focus on lessons learned from the tsunami, it will be appropriate for you to probe your interlocutors to learn how our years of joint combined exercises, training and cooperation has benefited Thailand's ability to take part in peacekeeping operations in East Timor, Afghanistan, and Iraq as well as prepare Thai forces to work better during the tsunami crisis. You will find the Thai Army to be by far the

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most powerful branch of the Thai armed forces. You may also wish to discuss challenges RTA and RTSC officers face in improving "jointness" among the Thai services. End Summary

THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP

2. (C) Bilateral relations with Thailand are very good. The goodwill generated by America's quick and massive response to the December 26 tsunami was palpable. Thailand is a Treaty Ally and has been firmly supportive of the International War on Terror and has participated in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). American businesses have over \$20 billion in direct investment in Thailand. The United States is Thailand's largest export market and its second-largest foreign investor.

3. (C) Nonetheless, there are points of friction. Human rights remains a key concern. On October 25, 2004, poorly trained Thai military and civilian security forces forced nearly 1,300 Thai Muslim protesters into trucks to be transported to a military base nearly three hours away. 78 protesters died en route. The State Department's annual human rights report (HRR), which in 2004 voiced concern over the lack of accountability for approximately 1,300 extrajudicial killings in the initial 2003 phase of a Thai "war on drugs" promoted by the Prime Minister, rankles the Thai Government.

4. (C) Thailand's policy of "constructive engagement" with the military junta in Burma and provision of economic assistance to Rangoon is a source of continuing frustration for us. The Thai government supports democracy in Burma but maintains, not altogether convincingly, that engagement with the SPDC is the only realistic approach it has to make progress on the major cross-border flows of refugees, illegal economic migrants, and methamphetamines it faces from Burma.

5. (C) It surprises many visitors from Washington to learn that the Thai military has a number of Chinese weapons systems in its arsenal. While Thai military links with the United States are deeper and far more apparent than Sino-Thai links, China's growing influence in Thailand and Southeast Asia is evident in business, the arts, the media and the military. Recently, we have learned that China is refurbishing tanks and air defense equipment provided to Thailand in the late 1980's. Thailand is also currently negotiating a barter deal trading Chinese armored vehicles for Thai fruit. Mil-to-mil exchanges between China and Thailand have expanded in recent years as has the number of bilateral military VIP visits.

MILITARY COOPERATION

6. (C) We conduct a wide range of major exercises and

training programs with Thailand each year, including Cobra Gold, the annual exercise which in 2004 involved approximately 13,500 U.S. service members and 6,000 Thais. Cobra Gold 2005 will be smaller than last year, primarily due to U.S. commitments elsewhere and the large number of U.S. forces sent to the region for tsunami relief. Utapao, the Thai Navy Air Base used as the primary staging area for U.S. disaster relief efforts in the region, has long been a critical support hub for U.S. aircraft transiting the region. Over 420 DoD aircraft use it each year. From January 25 until February 4, we conducted our largest air exercise with the Thai, Cope Tiger. This year, F-18's from the USS Abraham Lincoln participated. Our largest naval exercise is the Combined Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) series which will take place again in June. Recently, a number of senior U.S. military officials have visited Thailand -- then-Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz visited in January, Seventh

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Fleet Commander VADM Greenert came in February and March, SOCPAC Commander BG Fridovich was in Thailand April 17-20, 13 AF Maj.Gen. Rice came April 19-21, and JIATF-West Commander Admiral Rear Admiral Kelly visited April 20-24. ADM Fallon will be visiting Thailand a few days prior to your trip.

A NOTE ON THAI MILITARY STRUCTURE

17. (C) The relative power and influence of the Royal Thai Army (RTA) dwarfs the other services. As such, the Royal Thai Army Commander traditionally wields more real power than the Supreme Commander. General Chaisit Shinawatra was the head of the RTA until the military reshuffle last October. His "promotion" to head Supreme Command is viewed by many as the result of PM Thaksin's displeasure with Chaisit's inability to quickly control the unrest in the southern part of the country. In October, Thaksin named Deputy Supreme Commander Sirichai Thanyasiri (General SIR-A-CHAI) to take over strategic planning for the south. Thailand's armed forces, which had a history of interfering in the country's politics, have not emerged from the barracks since 1992 and appear to be fully reconciled to constitutional roles of defense and security. Their exposure to US civil-military values through their extensive participation in IMET training deserves some credit for this transformation of their attitude towards democracy.

THE RTA

18. (C) The RTA is a legacy force faced with serious modernization issues. Although 30 years have passed, the RTA is still primarily designed to defeat the large conventional threat that Vietnam represented in the mid-1980's. On paper, the RTA would seem to possess the capability to defeat a large conventional attack -- it seems to possess an impressive number of main battle tanks, TOW missiles, and helicopters. Digging deeper, however, one quickly discovers real equipment problems. 80 of Thailand's 100 M60A3 main battle tanks are inoperable, TOW missiles are past their useful life expectancy and, at any given time, only 30 of the RTA's 96 UH-1 helicopters are operational.

19. (C) Much of this decline in effectiveness is due to the budget constraints that were imposed from 1997-2001 after the Asian Financial Crisis. Since that time, budgets have increased slightly, but not to pre-1997 levels. Accordingly, the RTA must selectively choose how to modernize. Serious corruption in the procurement process is still widespread -- and acknowledged by many Thai officers. Consequently, the RTA relies on JUSMAGTHAI and the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) system for many of their high-profile procurement programs. Recent examples include:

- the 32 million USD purchase of 30 fully refurbished UH-1H helicopters;
- the 84 million USD purchase of 7 UH-60 helicopters (five already delivered, two due in December);
- a recent request for 20,000 M-16A4 rifles valued at 12 million USD, and;
- a proposal to buy and refurbish 7 AH-1 Cobras at a cost of 25 million USD.

110. (C) The RTA's transformation vision, unpublished and informal as it is, is to become lighter and more mobile with upgraded C4I systems that will make it more agile operationally. On the C4I front, much work remains. The RTA HQ and subordinate commands use commercial dial-up Internet services and email accounts, if they use email at all. They do have VTC capability and use it frequently.

THE TSUNAMI AFTERMATH AND COBRA GOLD

111. (U) The massive rescue and recovery operation undertaken by the U.S. military as a result of the December 26 tsunami was historic. Mercifully, U.S. casualties were much lighter (about two dozen confirmed or presumed dead) than those suffered by several other countries. Thousands of

Thai, Europeans and other Asians were killed in the Phuket area -- a haven for vacationers during the holiday season. Total fatalities will likely never be known; the official number is about 5,400 but Thai officials privately say they expect the final death toll to top 8,000.

112. (C) U.S. disaster relief efforts, led by the U.S. military, had an immediate impact on affected areas in Thailand. III MEF Commander, Lt. Gen. Robert Blackman, was the commanding general of Combined Support Force 536 (CSF 536), which was based out of Utapao. CSF 536 worked closely with the Embassy and JUSMAGTHAI to ensure that requests for assistance were promptly addressed and to assist coordination of relief from civilian agencies, NGOs and corporate donors. The Royal Thai Armed Forces granted the U.S. military blanket overflight clearances for relief operations in the region, including for aircraft from the USS Abraham Lincoln Battle Group which operated off Sumatra. In addition to permitting our use of Utapao, the Royal Thai Government integrated Thai officers into the CSF staff where needed. During the height of operations, over 1800 USG personnel operated out of Utapao. We distributed over 660,000 pounds of supplies within Thailand including medicine, food, dry ice and body bags. USAF C-130s made regular delivery runs from Utapao and Bangkok to affected areas for time sensitive supplies while bulk shipments tended to go overland. USN P-3s positioned at Utapao conducted search and rescue missions in the vicinity of Thailand and in the region. Teams made up of medical specialists from the CDC, the Armed Forces Research Institute of Medical Science and the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command in Hawaii were also deployed to Thailand to assist with victim identification. U.S. Navy SEALs and a representative from the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance worked closely with Thai military units to search for the remains of American and other victims of the disaster. From the beginning of the disaster, the Defense Attache Office painted the intel picture for commanders, forces, planners, and national decision makers. Embassy Bangkok provided 24-hour American Citizens Services for weeks after the crisis to assist Americans, claim Amcit remains and coordinate USG relief efforts.

113. (C) CSF 536's concept of operations set up Utapao as the hub for U.S. relief efforts bound for Sri Lanka and Indonesia in addition to Thailand. In each of those countries, Combined Support Groups (CSG) were established to interact with the local government, the U.S. Embassies and the NGO community. CSG-Thailand was based in Phuket and redeployed on January 22. Since that time, ongoing reconstruction efforts in Thailand are being managed by the Embassy, JUSMAGTHAI, and USAID. A key part of those efforts is to focus civil affairs projects carried out under our military exercise authority in Thailand to assist Thais rebuilding in the devastated areas around Phuket. At least one COMREL project conducted as part of Cobra Gold 05 will take place in the tsunami-devastated region.

114. (C) Cobra Gold 2005 will consist of a one-week disaster relief seminar for military, government civilians and NGOs, aimed at capturing some lessons learned from the tsunami mitigation effort followed by a one-week staff exercise in Chiang Mai focused on a disaster relief scenario. In your discussions with Thai officials, it will be appropriate for you to underscore the fact that our successes in mitigating the damage caused by the tsunami were due in no small part to the decades of military cooperation between our two countries, cooperation that is perhaps best symbolized by the annual Cobra Gold exercise. By focusing Cobra Gold 05 on disaster relief, we hope to capture the lessons learned by U.S., Thai, Japanese and Singaporean units who participated in Operation Unified Assistance and improve our ability to respond to future disasters.

VIOLENCE IN THE SOUTH

115. (C) Besides dealing with the tsunami aftermath, Prime Minister Thaksin's biggest domestic challenge is the unsettled security situation in the far southern part of the country. Southern Thailand, and in particular the southernmost Muslim majority provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, has experienced episodic violence since it was incorporated into the Siamese Kingdom in 1902. However, 2004 witnessed a dramatic increase in the level of violence, with over 500 people killed either by militants or by security forces. Local Muslim separatist militants have attacked symbols of Thai and Buddhist authority, and there continue to be almost daily incidents of violence, notably even after the tsunami disaster of December 26. Attacks most often involve

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isolated shootings of local officials, although increasingly sophisticated bombing attacks have become more common. While there is no credible evidence of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) or al-Qaeda direction of the violence, there is concern that they might attempt to exploit the local violence for their own purposes.

¶16. (C) Thaksin has recently acknowledged that the problem in Thailand's south is not simply the work of criminal gangs as he once declared, and is an issue that potentially reaches beyond Thailand's borders. Last December, Thaksin claimed publicly during a radio address that Thai militants are training in Malaysia and that Indonesian extremists are instigating some of the violence. This rather clumsy public assertion offended the two fellow ASEAN governments. Thaksin is not likely to ask for direct U.S. assistance as the RTG maintains -- as do we -- that the southern situation is primarily a domestic issue. Until recently, this violence was directed primarily at RTG institutions with no evidence of attacks directed towards foreign interests. On April 3, however, simultaneous bombs exploded outside a French-owned Carrefour supermarket in Songkla's Hat Yai City and at the Hat Yai airport, killing two persons and injuring two American citizens. Thai officials may ask you for U.S. equipment and technology such as UAVs to support efforts to monitor militant movements in the south. We recommend you be receptive but noncommittal, and suggest that technical experts follow up. You may also wish to point to our plans to improve human rights training for Thai soldiers and officers who will rotate to the south. We are working with U.S. experts to develop a multi-faceted training program to educate enlisted soldiers, mid-level officers and senior Thai leadership. It would be prudent to keep in mind that Thaksin -- and most Thais -- are sensitive about any perception that the U.S. wants to establish a security presence in the south. Outrageous but widely circulated rumors that the U.S. has fomented violence in the South also need to be considered when discussing offers of possible U.S. assistance. In your meetings, you may wish to:

- Seek your interlocutor's assessment of the situation in the south and to ask what the Thai strategy is to bring the situation under control;
- Point out our desire that any Thai security response be conducted while respecting international human rights norms and explain the negative consequences associated with incidents like Tak Bai.

THAILAND AND IRAQ

¶17. (C) Thailand dispatched two deployments to Iraq as part of OIF. In December 2003, two Thai soldiers were killed by a car bomb while on duty in Karbala. Thailand's second six-month deployment of 443 medics and engineers to Iraq ended on September 20, 2004. While participation in OIF has not caused the domestic furor in Thailand that it has in other countries, Thaksin's critics have used Thailand's deployments to Iraq against him. Several RTG officials have told us that Thailand's deployments have been used by militants to stir up dissent in the Muslim south. Recently, CJCS General Myers sent a letter to General Chaisit asking Thailand to consider sending staff officers to man the OIF Multinational Headquarters. It would be appropriate for you to ask your interlocutors how they intend to answer General Myers' request. Similarly, during your meetings with senior Thai officials, you may wish to:

- Express appreciation for Thailand's previous deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq;
- Explain that the Administration hopes Thailand will consider a follow-on deployment in support of OIF;
- Assure RTG leaders that U.S. military experts will help them shape the deployment.

INTEL COOPERATION

¶18. (C) PACOM J2 tried to implement an Intelligence Modernization Program with the Royal Thai Armed Forces during the past year. However, the Thai military intelligence community stiff-armed the offer, primarily on the questionable grounds that the individual services do not want or need to be part of the joint approach offered by USPACOM. This helps illustrate a problem the Thai military -- and the Thai Government -- has in dealing with the southern insurgency, i.e., excessive stovepiping of information and insufficient sharing within the Armed Forces or with other agencies. While our bilateral intel relationship is good, it can be improved, especially at the military-to-military level. USARPAC has been at the forefront of conducting valuable intelligence related subject matter expert exchanges for many years. In discussing intelligence matters with your interlocutors, you may wish to:

- Underscore lessons the U.S. Government has learned about intelligence cooperation and the necessity to link intelligence together from the military services, Joint Commands, and other Agencies.
- Emphasize that your G2, in coordination with the PACOM J2, will continue to work the RTA and joint pieces of intelligence modernization with the Royal Thai Armed Forces.

¶19. (U) We look forward to seeing you. Best wishes, and

have a safe journey.
BOYCE